

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

In recent years, the environmental considerations associated with highway construction have come to the forefront of the planning process. Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for projects that have a significant impact on the environment. The EIS includes impacts on wetlands, wildlife, water quality, historic properties and public lands. While this report does not cover the environmental concerns in as much detail as an EIS would, consideration for many of these factors was incorporated in the development of the Thoroughfare Plan. These factors were also incorporated into the benefits-costs analyses presented in **Chapter II** for the recommended improvements.

Wetlands

Wetlands are those lands where saturation with water is the dominant factor in determining the nature of soil development and the types of plant and animal communities inhabiting the soil. Wetlands are crucial ecosystems in our environment; they help to regulate and maintain the hydrology of rivers, lakes, and streams by storing and slowly releasing flood waters. Wetlands help maintain the quality of water by storing nutrients, reducing sediment loads, and reducing erosion. Wetlands are also critical to fish and wildlife populations, providing an important habitat for approximately one-third of the plant and animal species that are listed as threatened or endangered.

The impacts to wetland areas within the Laurinburg/East Laurinburg planning area were determined with the use of the National Wetlands Inventory Mapping provided by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The location of wetlands within the planning area is shown in **Figure 12**. Minimal impacts to wetlands and other water resources are expected to result from recommended improvements. However, this mapping is merely a best estimate of the approximate location of wetlands, based upon aerial photography rather than field data. Therefore, more extensive investigations will be required prior to the design of any recommended facilities.

Threatened and Endangered Species

The Threatened And Endangered Species Act of 1973 allows the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to impose measures on the Department of Transportation to mitigate the environmental impacts of a roadway project on endangered animal and plant species, as well as critical wildlife habitats. Locating any rare species that exist within the planning area during this early planning stage will help to avoid or minimize impacts.

A preliminary review of the Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species in the Laurinburg/East Laurinburg area was completed to determine what effects, if any, the recommended improvements may have on wildlife. Mapping from the N. C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources revealed occurrences of